

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0494

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PGOV PINS PORS ELTN MP
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - PARIL 21 - SUMMARY

REF: PORT LOUIS 0472 (DTG 131350Z APR 78)
PORT LOUIS AJA32, APRIL 21, 1978

1. PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM'S POSITION AS LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE LABOR PARTY SUFFERED FURTHER EROSION THIS WEEK AS HE FOUND HIMSELF IN A MINORITY POSITION IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS POLITICAL CAREER, A HUMILIATING DEFEAT WHICH WAS FOLLOWED BY SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS LEVELLED BY THE OPPOSITION MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM) AGAINST THE STATE SECURITY SERVICE (SSS), WHICH IS UNDER RAMGOOLAM'S DIRECT SUPERVISION. THE ISSUE ON WHICH THE GOVERNMENT SIDE LOST A VOTE WAS NOT A MAJOR ONE,
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AS IT CONCERNED SETTING UP A SELECT COMMITTEE MADE UP OF MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION TO STUDY THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT INDUSTRY, AN EXERCISE WHICH HAD ALREADY BEEN RENDERED FUTILE BY THE REFUSAL OF THE MMM TO SIT ON THE COMMITTEE. BUT THE CAUSE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S DEFEAT WAS THE ABSTENTION OF THREE MEMBERS OF THE DISSIDENT BOODHOO GROUP OF YOUNG LABOR DEPUTIES COMBINED WITH THE ABSENCE ABROAD OF THREE

GOVERNMENT MINISTERS. THERE WAS NO RISK OF THE GOVERNMENT FALLING, AS IT WAS NOT A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE, AND THE BOODHOO GROUP HAS PROMISED TO AVOID TAKING ANY ACTION THAT WOULD CAUSE THE GOVERNMENT TO FALL AND BRING THE MMM TO POWER. RAMGOOLAM AND HIS ASSOCIATES HAVE TRIED TO DOWN-PLAY THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PARLIAMENTARY DEFEAT, BUT IT IS NOW CLEAR TO ALL MAURITIANS THAT THEIR LONG-TIME PRIME MINISTER HAS LOST HIS AUTHORITY AND WILL HAVE TO MAKE CONTINUAL COMPROMISES AND CONCESSIONS TO THE DISSIDENTS IN HIS OWN PARTY IN ORDER TO REMAIN IN POWER.

2. FOLLOWING THIS DEFEAT FOR THE GOVERNMENT SIDE, THE APRIL 18 ASSEMBLY SESSION BECAME EVEN MORE HEATED AS THE MMM'S PAUL BERENGER PROCEEDED TO MAKE SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS ABOUT THE SSS, INCLUDING THE CHARGE THAT THE REGIME'S "POLITICAL POLICE," AS HE LABELLED THEM, HAD SET THE FIRE LAST JANUARY WHICH HAD DESTROYED A GOOD PART OF THE PREMISES OF LE MAURICIEN NEWSPAPER. HIS CHARGES WERE BASED ON INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY SHEIK HOSSEN, THE INDIVIDUAL WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN AN AGENT OF THE SPECIAL BRANCH INFILTRATED INTO LE CERCLE NEWSPAPER. BERENGER CLAIMED THAT A PROPER INQUIRY HAD NOT BEEN MADE INTO THE FIRE IN ORDER TO COVER UP THE SSS ROLE. HE CALLED FOR A SELECT COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE SSS, EMPHASIZING THAT THE ORGANIZATION IS UNDER THE DIRECT SUPERVISION OF THE PRIME MINISTER.

3. RAMGOOLAM AND THE DEPUTY SPEAKER BOTH CALLED ON BERENGER TO CONFIDENTIAL

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TABLE THE ALLEGED EVIDENCE HE WAS DISPLAYING AS HE SPOKE, CONSISTING OF DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS, AS REQUIRED BY THE STANDING ORDERS OF THE ASSEMBLY, BUT BERENGER REFUSED AND THE ENTIRE MMM CONTINGENT STAGED A NOISY WALKOUT WHILE SHOUTING INSULTS AT THE GOVERNMENT SIDE. TEMPER FLARED IN THE CORRIDORS AND THE POLICE HAD TO INTERVENE TO PREVENT FIGHTING BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES. THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE ISSUED A PROMPT AND CATEGORIC DENIAL OF BERENGER'S ALLEGATIONS ABOUT THE SSS, INCLUDING HIS CHARGES ABOUT THE MAURICIEN FIRE, WHILE DEPLORING THE FACT THAT HE HAD MADE THESE "FALSE ALLEGATIONS" UNDER THE SHELTER OF PARLIAMENTARY IMMUNITY. THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR THEN ANNOUNCED THAT THE MATTER WAS SUB-JUDICE, AS HE HAD LAST MONTH ORDERED A JUDICIAL INQUIRY INTO THE CAUSES OF THE FIRE, AND ANY REPORT OR COMMENT ON THE FIRE WOULD AMOUNT TO A CONTEMPT OF COURT FOR WHICH THE LAW PROVIDES SEVERE PENALTIES.

4. THE MMM ANNOUNCED IT WOULD HOLD A SERIES OF MEETINGS AROUND THE COUNTRY AS PART OF A CAMPAIGN TO FORCE THE GOVERNMENT TO RESIGN, TO BE CLIMAXED WITH A NATIONAL RALLY ON MAY FIRST. THE LABOR PARTY IS HOLDING MEETINGS ON HOW TO COUNTER THE "FASCIST VIOLENCE" OF THE MMM. THE BOODHOO GROUP INSISTS IT IS NOT TRYING TO FORCE THE PRIME MINISTER TO STEP DOWN AND

RAMGOOLAM CLAIMS IT IS "EVERYONES WISH" THAT HE CONTINUE IN
OFFICE THOUGH HE HAS BEEN OFFERING TO RETIRE SINCE LAST YEAR.
MOST NAURITIAN OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE PRESENT SITUATION CANNOT
LONG ENDURE, AND THAT THE EMBATTLED PRIME MINISTER WILL HAVE TO

DO SOMETHING DECISIVE SOON OR HE WILL COMPLETELY LOSE CONTROL.
KEELEY

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